

COVID-19 VACCINE

COVID-19 VACCINE FAQs

IS THE VACCINE SAFE?

The vaccine developed by Pfizer/BioNTech has been approved for use in the UK after meeting strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness set out by the independent Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), which follows international standards of safety.

The same vaccine has also been approved for use in the United States by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Thousands of people have been given a COVID-19 vaccine so far, and no serious side effects or complications have been reported.

HOW DOES THE VACCINE WORK?

The vaccine introduces genetic material called mRNA into the body that contains instructions to make a spike protein of COVID-19. In response to the protein, the body's immune system starts to make antibodies which provide protection if a person comes into contact with the virus.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SIDE EFFECTS?

Side effects include a sore arm where the needle went in, headaches, tiredness and achiness. Most side effects are mild, can be treated with painkillers such as Tylenol and should not last longer than a week. If your side effects are more extreme, please contact your doctor. In very rare cases, people can have a serious anaphylactic reaction within minutes of receiving the vaccine. This will be treated by the qualified and trained medical staff who give the vaccination and who will monitor each person for 15min after the vaccine is administered.

WHAT STUDIES HAVE BEEN DONE TO CONFIRM THAT THIS VACCINE IS SAFE?

The Pfizer vaccine has been through all the same clinical trials and safety checks as other licensed medicines in the UK, US Canada and Europe. In the UK, a two-month clinical study involving about 19,000 vaccinated people showed the most common side effects were injection site reactions, fatigue, headaches, muscle pain, chills, joint pain and fever.

IS THERE A GUARANTEE THAT I WILL BE PROTECTED?

The Pfizer vaccine is 95% effective. This means that most people will be protected against COVID-19 after receiving two doses of the vaccine. It can take two weeks for the second dose to work, and there remains a small chance you could still get the coronavirus. If you happen to be in the remaining 5% the chances are that your COVID-19 symptoms will be less severe.



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IS THERE A GUARANTEE THAT I WILL BE PROTECTED?(CONTINUED)

It remains important to avoid the three C's, closed spaces, crowded places and close-contact settings, practice physical distancing guidance, wash and sanitise your hands, wear a face mask in public areas and download the WeHealth Bermuda app after receiving the vaccine.

WHY DO I NEED TWO DOSES?

The Pfizer vaccine is designed to be given in two injections 21 days apart. A typical flu vaccine only requires one dose because it simply puts a weakened or inactivated virus into the body to trigger an immune response and produce antibodies. The Pfizer vaccine works differently by introducing mRNA into your body so your body primes its system. The second dose gives the boost of immunity. While you get some immunity from the first injection, it increases dramatically with the second one.

To put it into perspective, one dose has shown to be 52% effective whilst two doses provide 95% effectiveness. If you miss your scheduled second dose or you don't get it on time, just get it as soon as you can. The second dose of this vaccine trains the body to provide long lasting immunity that is superior to what is available through natural infection.

FOR HOW LONG WILL I BE PROTECTED?

Pfizer/ BioNTech has said it expects protection to last months or even years and it might vary for each individual.

HOW LONG DOES THE VACCINE TAKE TO WORK?

It starts to work after the first dose but full effect is not seen until after the second dose.

SHOULD I GET THE VACCINE IF I PLAN ON GETTING PREGNANT?

If you are trying to become pregnant now or plan on getting pregnant in the future, we recommend that you get a COVID-19 vaccine when one is available to you. There is currently no evidence that suggests that vaccines, including COVID-19 vaccines, cause fertility problems.

Routine pregnancy testing before a COVID-19 vaccination is not recommended, however, if you are trying to become pregnant, you do not need to avoid pregnancy after the COVID-19 vaccine. Similar to all vaccines, scientists are studying COVID-19 vaccines carefully and will report findings as they become available.



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SHOULD I GET THE VACCINE IF I'M PREGNANT OR NURSING?

Data shows that any of the currently authorized COVID-19 vaccines can be offered to people who are pregnant or breastfeeding. Pregnant people are at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19, which could result in intensive care admission, mechanical ventilation or even death. In addition, pregnant people with COVID might be at increased risk of adverse pregnancy outcomes, such as preterm birth, compared with pregnant women without COVID-19.

Getting vaccinated is a personal choice, so if you have any questions, a conversation with your health provider might help.

WHO WILL GET THE VACCINE FIRST?

Healthcare workers, essential service providers, seniors and the extremely vulnerable.

IS THERE A COST TO GET THE VACCINE?

The vaccine will be provided by the Government of Bermuda at no cost.

DO I HAVE TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT TO GET VACCINATED?

Yes. Please be aware that it is extremely important that you go to your scheduled appointment as there is a limited supply of the vaccine and there are strict storage and vaccination protocols that must be followed. If you don't attend, you may be depriving someone else from getting a vaccination. Please register your interest for a vaccine at: <https://vaccine.resqwest.com/web>

WILL THE VACCINE GIVE ME COVID-19?

No, the Pfizer vaccine does not contain the COVID-19 virus.

AT WHAT AGE IS THE VACCINE SAFE TO GIVE TO MY BABY?

There are no current guidelines for administration of the vaccine to babies. The current guidelines for the Pfizer vaccine is to be used on people aged 16 and older.

CAN I GET THE VACCINE AT THE SAME TIME AS THE FLU VACCINE?

No. Studies have been conducted into taking the vaccine at the same time as other studies, so it should be given on its own.

ONCE I AM VACCINATED, DOES THAT MEAN I CAN STOP WEARING A MASK AND TAKING OTHER PRECAUTIONS?

The vaccine has a 95% success rate, seven days after the second dose, so mask-wearing is still required and encouraged. Also please note that individual immune responses may differ. During the transition period we are still required to follow the Government Guidance on Public Safety around COVID-19.



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WHERE CAN I GET THE VACCINE?

There are currently two vaccine centres for the public. One at the Bermuda College and the other at the Bermuda Hospitals Board.

WILL THERE BE A RECORD OF MY VACCINATION?

A record of immunisation will be provided and recorded for safety and so side effects (if there are any) can be recorded.

WHAT OTHER PAPERWORK DO I NEED TO COMPLETE?

You will be required to complete a consent form.

IF I ALREADY TESTED POSITIVE FOR COVID-19, SHOULD I STILL GET A VACCINE?

When people recover from some viral infections, such as measles or mumps, they are protected against reinfection and would not need to be vaccinated. However, for other diseases, such as pneumococcal pneumonia or influenza, it is important to be vaccinated (or revaccinated) despite having disease because the vaccine protects against several strains or types of the pathogen and thus can still be valuable.

There is no evidence that there are significant differences in SARS-CoV-2 to warrant vaccination for this reason, but we do not yet know how long people are protected after having COVID-19 and so do not yet know if these people should be vaccinated. If protection only lasts for several months, vaccination could be of benefit.

SHOULD I GET THE VACCINE FOR INFLUENZA (FLU SHOT)?

Yes, it is very important to get the influenza vaccine, particularly this season when both influenza viruses and SARS-CoV-2 could infect people. It is not known how these two viruses will interact but people can get infected with both and could cause more severe disease and possibly death. Reducing the number of people who get influenza and require hospitalisation will also help ensure that the health care system, hospital and intensive care unit will not be overwhelmed should there be an increase in COVID-19 cases in Bermuda this winter.

WILL WE STILL NEED TO WEAR MASKS, WASH OUR HANDS AND PRACTICE PHYSICAL DISTANCING ONCE A VACCINE IS AVAILABLE?

YES! You should still wear a mask, wash and sanitise your hands and practice physical distancing until a large proportion of the population is vaccinated and it is confirmed that the vaccine provides long-term protection. Initially, there will not be enough doses in Bermuda to vaccinate everyone who wants the vaccine therefore the virus may still be transmitted.



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Although the Phase 3 clinical trials are designed to determine whether vaccinated individuals are protected against disease, it will also be important to understand whether vaccinated individuals are less likely to transmit the virus. This information is still being assessed.

As the vaccine not only protects against disease but also reduces transmission, and continues to do so for many years, we are likely to reach a state of herd protection when masks, hand washing and physical distancing will no longer be required. Herd protection is achieved when a sufficient proportion of the population is made non-infectious through vaccination or natural infection so that the likelihood of an infectious individual transmitting to a susceptible individual is very low.

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GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA
Ministry of Health

Visit: www.gov.bm/vaccines
for more information